

Bach To The Future!

Study Guide

Teacher's Supplement

(To be used in conjunction with the Student Study Guide entitled "From Bach To The Future - A project about classical music")



Last revised 2011

Introduction

Welcome to the Platypus Theatre study guide for “Bach to the Future”. This guide and teacher’s supplement have been created to help you prepare your students for the concert you will be attending and also to stimulate creativity in your music classes at school. If you are not a music teacher don’t get over-whelmed by the material! Choose only the exercises that you feel confident in exploring with your students: a few simple exercises done in conjunction with reading the material in the study guide will greatly enhance your students’ enjoyment of the concert. If nothing else, simply learn the song in the “Romantic Era” portion of the guide with your students.

We hope this material is helpful to you. If you have any comments about the study guide or the concert please let us know. We can be reached at the address below or through the “Your comments” page on our website.

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About the program

As with all Platypus Theatre concerts, “Bach to the Future” uses a story to focus attention on symphonic music and to explore specific musical and social themes. This program introduces students to the music of the Baroque, Classical, Romantic and Modern eras and explores the questions “Where does creativity comes from?” and “Who creates music?” The program also encourages the students to explore and value their own ability to create.

The Story

(N.B. We do not recommend reading this synopsis to the students as they will discover the story at the concert. It is included here to give an understanding of how the material in the study guide relates to the actual concert.)

"A school project about classical music?!" wails Corky, "What do I know about classical music?" Uncle Siegfried to the rescue! But when Corky accidentally combines the ingredients of a recipe for a musical spell the magical-musical professor is working on, she finds herself in a time she has only read about in books. Through meetings with some of the world's greatest composers, Corky discovers the beauty of great music as she attempts to recreate the musical formula that will take her home.

The Repertoire

Includes excerpts from:

BachSuite #1 (1st movement), Suite #3 (“Air” and “Gigue”)

MozartSymphony #40 (1st, 2nd and 4th movements)

BeethovenSymphony #5 (3rd movement), Leonore Overture #3

Dvorak.....New World Symphony (“Largo”)

Dvorak.....Slavonic Dance #8. op. 46

Shostakovich.....Symphony #5 (last movement)

Ridout.....Fall Fair

Part One - Music in Everyone

As the students will find out at the concert it is not only famous composers who can create music. Music can be created by anybody in many different ways. Once the students have read the introduction in their guide, “From Bach To The Future - A project about classical music”, try the following musical game with them.

Exercise 1 - The Music Machine

One student stands at the front of the class and begins a machine-like gesture accompanied by a sound. (e.g. bending and straightening the knees accompanied by the vocal sounds “Ha!... Peep!... Ha!... Peep!...etc.”) The student repeats the gesture and sound over and over. Another student joins the first and adds to the machine, creating a gesture of their own with an accompanying sound. (It adds to the fun and to the understanding of how different components of music work together if the gestures are related — like a conveyor belt. For example, if the first student creates a gesture that looks like a machine passing objects from one side of their body to the other, the second student could create a gesture with which they received the passed object and threw it up in the air, the third student could catch it and flatten it and so on..)

Part Two - The Baroque Era

In the Baroque era we will focus on the music of Johann Sebastian Bach. One of the characteristics of Bach’s writing was the elegant continuous flow of his melodies. As opposed to later composers such as Mozart who created short themes and then played with them endlessly — repeating and developing the same phrase over and over in different ways — Bach’s melodies were like an endless flowing stream; sometimes winding back on itself or intertwining with parallel streams but continuously moving forward.

As Corky explains in the guide, Bach had a dramatic life with many triumphs and tragedies. This drama is reflected in his music. Once the students have read the “Baroque Era” section in the guide try these exercises.

Exercise 2 - Stories in Music

- 1) Listen to the slow **Second movement of Bach's Orchestral Suite #3**. Ask the students to write a story or draw a picture based on the music. What story is the music telling? What might have been going on in Bach's life when he wrote this piece?
- 2) Repeat the exercise with the triumphant "**Gigue**" from the same suite.

(N.B. If the specific music is not available the exercise can be done using other music that has distinctive moods.)

- 3) Open a discussion about the mood of a piece of music. What is it that makes a piece of music sound sad or happy, frightening or triumphant? Do certain instruments create certain moods? Is it the tempo? The dynamics? The use of major or minor chords? Ask the students to think about music that they know, any kind of music. What is it, besides the words, that makes us feel a certain way when listening to music? How does the music tell its story? Ask the students to think about the soundtracks to their favorite movies? How does that music help tell the story? What does the composer do to make the music fit with the action?

Exercise 3 - Dancing Rhythms (Counterpoint)

- 1) Create a simple 4-beat rhythmic phrase that can be repeated over and over using clapping, finger-flicking, thigh-slapping, etc.

Example: [Thigh-thigh], [flick-flick],[thigh-flick], [clap]

1 2 3 4

Play your phrase to the students one after the other and ask them to answer with a phrase of their own.

Example: You play: [Thigh-thigh], [flick-flick],[thigh-flick], [clap]

1 2 3 4

Answer: [Clap-clap-clap], [thigh-thigh], [flick-clap], [thigh]

1 2 3 4

- 2) Repeat the exercise adding the rhythms one on top of the other to create a symphony of dancing rhythms.
- 3) Break the class up into small groups (4 per group or so). Have the children develop their own pieces layering their repeated phrases one on top of the other. Have the groups present their creations to the rest of the class.

Part Three - The Classical Era

In this era we will focus on the music of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Ludwig van Beethoven. As mentioned earlier one of the great differences between the Baroque and Classical eras was the development of theme and variation. A defining characteristic of Mozart's music was the way he used short themes which recurred in different forms throughout a piece of music. Gone were the long elegant phrases of Bach's music to be replaced by the playful use of variation on a simple phrase. After the students have read the "Classical Era" section of the guide try one or more of the following exercises with them.

Exercise 4 - Endless Variations

Play or sing a short phrase. Have each student in turn play the same phrase but in their own way. Have them explore the possibilities of varying the tempo, the dynamics, the rhythm, the mood.

Exercise 5 - Listening (Mozart, Symphony #40)

Have the students listen to any of the three movements of the 40th symphony that they will hear at the concert (movements 1, 2 and 4). Listen for the themes and how they come back again and again throughout the piece.

Exercise 6 - Art and Poverty

Artists throughout history and two featured in this program (Mozart and Dvorak) have had to struggle to earn a living while producing great works of art. Open a discussion with your students about art and poverty. Who are the artists they know? Are they able

to earn a living from their work? Are there poor artists today? Who are they? How do the musicians they know of today compare to the poor musicians featured in the program? Are there great artists today who can't earn a living?

Exercise 7 - Listening (Beethoven, Symphony #5, 3rd movement)

Ludwig van Beethoven's life was marked by the struggle against despair. Beethoven grew up in abject poverty and struggled all his life to maintain hope. This struggle was accentuated by the gradual loss of his hearing beginning at the age of 28. Beethoven however believed in the idea of universal brotherhood and his music often focuses on the triumph of light over darkness.

Have the students listen to the third movement of the fifth symphony paying particular attention to the moments of darkness and those of triumph. Ask them to imagine what it must have been like to write such music and not be able to hear it.

Part Four - The Romantic Era

Antonin Dvorak's music is characterized by its beautiful folk-like melodies. Some scholars believe that his music is based on actual folk songs but it is not clear whether that is the case or if he simply created melodies that could easily have been folk songs. The two pieces we will play at the concert are both good examples of folk-based music.

Exercise 8 - Listening (Slavonic Dance #8)

Slavonic dance #8, was composed on the request of Dvorak's friend the composer Johannes Brahms who asked him to write something typical of his country. Dvorak allowed himself to be inspired by the gypsy peasants who lived in the country-side of Bohemia.

Have the students listen to the dance paying attention to the way the music creates the festive atmosphere of a campfire party.

Exercise 9 - Singing **

The largo from Dvorak's 5th symphony, the "New World Symphony", has a stunning melody which some people believe was based on the folk song "Swing Low Sweet Chariot" from the composer's adoptive home, the United States. Dvorak denied that he based the melody on the song but in any case the result is a beautifully singable melody. We will sing it altogether at the concert. Please learn the song with your students.

ANTON DVOŘÁK

Largo (♩ = 62)

DAY IS DONE, NIGHT IS COME

STARS ARE SHIN-ING BRIGHT; COME SWEET SLEEP
MY SOUL TO KEEP, TAKE A-WAY MY FRIGHT

ALL THE CARES OF THE DAY MELT A-WAY WITH SLEEP. TOIL AND FEAR DIS-AP-PEAR

SOOTHED IN SLUMBER DEEP. WITH THE MORN, HOPES RE-BORN WOR-RIES HAVE ALL PASSED.

DAY WILL BREAK, I'LL A-WAKE NIGHT-MARES CAN NOT LAST. I'LL BE HOME AT

LAST.

Part Five - The Modern Era

Dmitri Shostakovich lived in Russia from 1906-1975. The piece we will hear in the concert is his Symphony #5, one of his great triumphs, but when Shostakovich first began writing, his music was not liked as musicians, audience and critics found it too jarring, dissonant and chaotic. People were used to hearing the beautiful melodies of the music of the romantic era and weren't ready for the powerful chaos of Shostakovich's music. But he was living in a chaotic world full of modern sounds and social and political unrest. The sounds of his time are reflected in his music as you will hear at the concert.

Exercise 10 - Music from Life

- 1) Ask the children to bring to school an object from their daily life that makes an interesting sound. This could be two pieces of wood that resonate nicely when banged together; a tin can with ripples on the sides that can be scraped with a pencil; dried peas in a paper bag.
- 2) Have the students listen to each others' sounds.
- 3) Repeat the "Dancing Rhythms" exercise from part one only this time using the students "found" instruments.
 - a) Create a simple 4-beat rhythm on your "found" instrument then one after another ask the students to answer your 4-beat phrase with a phrase on their instrument.
 - b) Repeat the exercise adding the phrases one on top of each other to create a symphony (and perhaps a cacophony) of strange sounds.
 - c) Divide the class into small groups (4 per group or so) and have the children develop a short piece using their found instruments.
 - d) Present the compositions to the rest of the group.
 - e) Open a discussion about how the sounds fit together. Which sounds work well together and which ones sound strange? Do contrasting sounds work well

together or similar sounds? Can they combine very different sounds to create interesting effects? Have them try repeating their compositions but altering the dynamics or the tempo.

Epilogue - (Post-concert follow-up)

Exercise 11 - Response to the Concert

Have the students write a letter or draw a picture in response to the program. What did they like or dislike about the concert? What music did they like best? What differences did they notice about the music from the various eras? What questions do they have about the music or the production?

An interesting twist on this exercise is to have the students write a story or draw a picture about something that *didn't* happen on stage. What happened to the characters before or after the scenes in the story?

(We are always happy to receive feedback from children whether written or drawn. Students can send their responses to the address at the front of this supplement or respond to the shows directly through the “Your comments” page on our website at www.platypustheatre.com. We will respond to any letters sent to us and post selected letters and drawings on the site.)

Exercise 12 - Soundscapes

Divide the class into small groups and using the “found” instruments from exercise 10 ask them to tell a story using sound. This can be either a story they invent or a story from a book. One student reads the story while the others create the sound effects or “soundscape” to enhance the mood of the story. Have them present their stories to the rest of the class.

An interesting alternative to the exercise above is to have the class create the story of “Bach To The Future” to be presented to the smaller children in the school — the kindergarten or grade one class. This can be done as a story-book with pictures or presented as a story-telling with sound effects.

